III

THE LEGACY

IN THE last of the epistles of the first book (I 20) Horace addresses his little volume and wonders about its fate in time to come. "You may be thumbed," he says, "by the hands of the vulgar [or, as we should say, become a best-seller] or make food for moths, or be exiled to Africa or Spain. Ah, something more dreadful yet may be in store; you may become a text-book for beginners in the outskirts of Rome." Of this blithe parody of the poet's prophecy of his immortality, in fact of the very prophecy that Horace at the end of the *Odes* had made, the final prediction has been amply fulfilled. Horace indeed has become a text-book, not only for beginners but for those who would study that subject most "advanced," the Spirit of Comedy.[1] Such is his legacy to mankind.

It would be interesting in this final lecture to invite to a feast with Horace, to which George Meredith would also be asked, the rare spirits all down the centuries before his time and after, and listen to their table-talk. But instead of calling the roll of these guests, some of whom Meredith had already invited, I will summon just one, in view of the special honor that is paid to him in this his quatercentenary—Erasmus. I will speak somewhat fully of his life and works, since as was true, we saw, of Horace, it is only on the background of the serious that comedy can be correctly seen.

[1] Maurice Baring, in his delightful common-place book, *Have You Anything to Declare?* (London, Heinemann [1936]) declares (p. 61): "Even school did not spoil Horace for me."

For Erasmus, like Horace, was a serious man—only that, like Horace, he also knew how to play.

Had I the art, and the inclination, of the writers of what today are called "true" histories of heroic figures of the past, there would be plenty of material at hand for a "true" history of Erasmus. These veracious historians, to be carefully distinguished from the eminent liars who preceded them, poke about, as a wise man once used to say, in the backyards of great people, to see what unpleasant matter may be discovered in their ash-barrels.[1] With such an aim in view, and with plenty of the familiar letters of Erasmus accessible in the monumental edition of a great Oxford scholar, it is only too easy to show that our hero was mean, irritable, self-centered, timid, obsequious, shifty, as mendicant as the friars whom he ridiculed, and disloyal to the friends and patrons from whom he had begged. The number and the quality of his begging-letters suggest not the *Epistles* of Horace but the appeals of the unblushing Martial or the wails of Ovid from his place of exile on the Black Sea. One might call Erasmus, if the tongue were allowed to run on, a parasite who thought the world owed him a living, a parasite, moreover, who knew how to have his cake and eat it too. Then it would be easy to prove his downright cadishness, his habit of writing up in satiric—and, it must be admitted, entertaining—*Colloquia* the foibles of his hosts, such as Aldus's father-in-law, who with a malicious touch becomes akin with the monumental misers of Plautus and Horace and Molière—a pleasant return for a week-end visit. Or Erasmus can dwell on the bleakness of Cambridge (Cam-

[1] After all, they are no novelty. Fielding recognized their tribe (*Tom Jones,* Book VI, 1): "The truth-finder, having raked out that jakes, his own mind, and being then capable of tracing no ray of divinity, nor anything virtuous or good, or lovely, or loving, very fairly, honestly, and logically concludes that no such things exist in the whole creation."

bridge, England) and its awful food and still more awful wine, at a time when the generosity of Cambridge was keeping him from starvation, with the help of a benefice secured by Archbishop Warham at a small parish that he never visited—a benefice that he resigned in order to accept the larger part of it as a pension. Or the "true" historian may wax indignant at Erasmus's vacillation, his cowardice, in the face of the great religious controversy that was shaking the world. Did he not, in the oft-quoted saying of a contemporary, lay the egg that he persuaded Luther to hatch? And did he not, after the egg was hatched, cackle a protest from a safe corner of the barnyard? Finally, after amassing a damning array of evidence from Erasmus's own works, the "true" historian can support it by the utterances of Erasmus's many enemies, some of them once his friends, with particular support from Martin Luther.

No such indictment can even be dreamed of in the case of Horace, who from first to last, for all his dallying with Comedy, was engaged in a course of self-analysis and self-improvement. If I may indulge in a paradox, there is more understanding of the Catholic confessional in Horace than in Erasmus. But despite the faults of him whom Pope called "that great injur'd name," I find a more critical approach to the inner heart of a great man offered by the biographers of mediaeval saints, who, assuming that their heroes were subject to the infirmities of poor humanity, present not these infirmities but the victories achieved despite them. These mediaeval eulogies are of course not wholly admirable as monuments of historical truth. Erasmus pays his respects to their gratuitous fictions, but in his own life of his great model St. Jerome, in which he makes these criticisms, he is at one with them in their central aim, which is to extol and not to depreciate the persons of renown to whom their works

are devoted. He might have found as many petty failings in his hero as certain of his chroniclers find in him today. It takes a little mind to make out Erasmus a little man. It takes the mind of an Erasmus to set forth a Jerome in his due proportions.

A cure for the vilifying critic would be the contemplation, first from the outside and then from within, of the eleven stout folio volumes of Erasmus's works in the Basle edition issued by his faithful Froben four years after his death or of those in the no less monumental Leyden edition published in 1703. Had I the learning, or this hour the moments, I could best present to you the vast scholarship, the eloquence, the wit, the wisdom and the piety of Erasmus, by a mere enumeration of the titles of these works with a word on their contents. Then we should read together the preface by his friend, the learned humanist Beatus Rhenanus. Even more important than that is the catalogue of his works which Erasmus himself had drawn up at the request of another friend. It is more than a catalogue. In the manner of St. Augustine's *Retractationes* he reviews his works and passes judgments on them. It is a literary biography which inevitably becomes personal at times. It is Erasmus's *apologia pro libris suis*. I read it not long ago, after perusing a recent work[1] of two volumes about Erasmus—a helpful work —but I learned more about the real Erasmus in his own twenty-five pages. I also came devoutly to the conclusion that I know very little about Erasmus and that I should like to devote the remainder of my days on earth to reading every one of those eleven volumes from cover to cover, not with the idea of pouring another bucket into the flood of books about Erasmus, but of having a good time. All that

[1] J. J. Mangan, *Life, Character and Influence of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam,* New York, Macmillan, 1927. An excellent feature of this work is the plentiful citation, in good translations, from Erasmus's own writings.

I can do this evening is to make this hasty lecture—a kind of Praise *by* Folly—converge on what seems to me, everything considered, the most important of his works, one of the most widely read and praised and damned, one of which he was not wholly proud, but one to which Horace had led him and one which so long as men can laugh will make his name immortal.

But I have at least allowed the *advocatus diaboli* a long enough discourse to indicate that there is something baffling about Erasmus. An editorial on him in the *New York Times* of last November is headed "An Enduring Enigma." There are two sides, or many sides, to his character and his temperament. It is a pity that the late Gamaliel Bradford, who brought up Psyche from the menial state to which psychology had reduced her, had not devoted one of his delicate analyses to the soul of Erasmus. It is beyond my powers to search that soul or to examine with any closeness Erasmus's relation to the thought of his age or that of the ages to come. Whether he was really a Protestant at heart or an Anglican churchman, high or low or broad, or at heart a free-thinker, or a cynic at heart are questions too profound for my analysis. The answers might be partly found merely by the contemplation of his eleven volumes.

Of two things I am certain. One is that Erasmus was no coward. It takes courage to enter the lists on either side and fight in the front line. It takes no less courage to place an Horatian armchair in No-man's land, or, to use his own language, in the arena of gladiators, and amid the whizzing of bullets, or of darts, to smoke one's pipe and observe humanity. "The sum of the charges against me," he declares, "is that I am too moderate. I am rebuked by both sides because I exhort both sides to more tranquil counsels." Or again, "My temperament is such that I can even love a Jew,

provided that he is a moderately agreeable table-companion and does not in my presence belch blasphemies on the name of Christ." Erasmus's blunder was to treat everybody as a human being in an age when most people wanted you to treat everybody as either a saint or a devil. It was an age, like our own, that had somewhat forgotten how to play. If the predicament of Erasmus was not quite that of which Horace speaks—*sanus inter insanos*—he was at least a *lepidus inter morosos*.

The other thing of which I am sure is that Erasmus was a Catholic. His status in life was that of a priest and Augustinian monk. He received dispensations from two Popes, Julian II and Leo X, allowing him to doff his monastic garb and absolving him from two of the three vows, poverty—from which he, at first, did not need to be absolved—and obedience to his superior at Steyn; but, if I mistake not, he remained a member of his Order to the end. Sympathizing at first with Luther's program of reforms, he later repented of certain antimonastic and anticurial utterances of his own, which he declared he would not have made had he known of the tragedy, as he puts it, that was to come upon the world. He openly opposed Luther in an urbane work on the freedom of the will. He answered Luther's terrific retort with something of his energy, yet concluded with a prayer for his conciliation and the harmony of the Church. In the words of the Mass celebrated over his mortal remains in the Cathedral of Basle: *requiescat in pace et lux perpetua luceat ei.*

Let us review, in all brevity, the main facts in the life of Erasmus. Outwardly, it was not a comfortable life. The first part was spent in getting enough to live on, the latter part in finding out where it was safe to live.

Desiderius Erasmus was born at Rotterdam about 1466,

the illegitimate son of a priest. This unhappy beginning of a career had much to do with some of his later acts, since a priest in his condition could not normally receive a benefice. He was put in the school of Peter Winkel at Gouda and then in that of the Brothers of the Common Life at Deventer. Against his better judgment, he joined the Order of the Augustinians at Steyn. There he immersed himself in the study of the ancient authors, wrote poetry and learned to paint. He was ordained a priest in 1492, when Columbus was discovering our country. He was allowed leave of absence from the monastery to become the secretary of Henry of Bergen, with a chance for freer studies and the prospect of a voyage to Rome. The latter dream was not fulfilled; instead, at the instigation of his friend Jacob Batt, he was allowed to establish himself in Paris, to study for the doctor's degree in Divinity. With the help of a new patron, his pupil Lord Mountjoy, he visited Oxford in 1499, where he met Colet and other scholars, above all that "half of his own soul," as Horace said of Virgil (*animae dimidium meae*), Sir Thomas More, who today is well acclaimed St. Thomas More. After a varied experience at Paris, Orléans, Louvain, and another visit to England in 1505, he secured a position as tutor of the two sons of Battista Boerio, physician of King Henry VII of England; he was to superintend their travels in Italy. His dream of Italy had at last come true. He received the Doctorate in Divinity at Turin and visited Bologna, where he was disgusted with the warrior Pope Julius II. After a brief sojourn at Florence, he came to the great Aldus in Venice, where his complete edition of the *Adagia* was brought out, in 1508. Going to Padua, he acquired a new pupil in the young Alexander Stuart, natural son of James IV of Scotland, whom he took to Siena and at last to Rome, where he was acclaimed by the Cardinals Gri-

mani and Giovanni dei Medici, the future Pope Leo X. The Archbishop of Canterbury, William Warham, who had been reading the *Adagia,* promised him support in England, so he made his way back there, mentally composing his work—that supreme work of which I have spoken, *The Praise of Folly*—on a horseback ride in the Alps and a voyage down the Rhine. On arriving in London at the end of 1509 he went straight to the house of Thomas More, and in seven days, while racked with illness and without resort to books, he dashed off *The Praise of Folly.* Two years later, he crossed to Paris, where the book had perhaps surreptitiously been printed, returning to accept a professorship in Divinity at Queen's College, Cambridge. In the oft-quoted epigram of Gibbon, untrue like all epigrams, but none the less acceptable to Oxonians, Erasmus learned Greek at Oxford and taught it to Cambridge. *The Praise of Folly* was Erasmus's play, a *jeu d'esprit, fait en cheminant.* The works that embodied the great plan of which he had dreamed for some years, were a new edition of the New Testament with a translation and a commentary and the edition of the works of St. Jerome. Froben of Basle contracted for them, and there he went in 1514. Another cause dear to his heart was peace. This he expressed in a satire discreetly published anonymously called *Julius Exclusus,* or *Pope Julius Shut Out of Heaven.* Steyn tried to recapture him, but a new monastery was his, that of the printer Froben, where if *laborare* is *orare,* his life was monastic indeed. And even in his playtime his mind, it would seem, knew no rest. It was not quiescent, but refreshing itself with its wit.

Of Erasmus's subsequent works and travels, of the patronage of the Emperor Maximilian, of his professorship at Louvain, of his sojourn in Freiburg when Basle became too Protestantly hot, of his conflicts with Luther on the one

hand, and Lee and various ardent ultramontanes on the other, I will not speak. Contemplate instead those eleven volumes and the portraits by Holbein and Metsys and the painting of Erasmus and his friends at Basle by Gogen. You will find them all in a beautiful work by Daniel Van Damme, director of the Museum of Anderlicht, one of the best tributes to Erasmus in this the four hundredth anniversary of his death. His beloved More was put to death in July, 1535. Erasmus returned to Basle to superintend the printing of his last work, an edition of Origen. He refused the offer of a Cardinalate made by Pope Paul III. He made his will, in which he left bequests to various friends, to young scholars needing funds, to the poor and the sick and, mindful, no doubt, of his mother, to young girls wishing a decent marriage. He had thoughts of spending his last days in Burgundy or Brabant, but he was too ill to travel. He died on July 11th or 12th, 1536. The friends at his bedside heard him murmur: *O Iesu misericordia, Domine libera me; Domine miserere mei.*[1] But as death came upon him he cried out in his boyhood tongue, *Lieve God.*

Erasmus's life was devoted to learning. He truly says that he sought not wealth but a quick road to learning,[2] and that oblivious to fame, of which he had a plenty, he was more ambitious for learning than for himself. He had plenty of chances to attach himself to some potentate of Church or State, live at ease and survey humanity from an ivory tower, but nothing could swerve him from his great

[1] Erasmus kept his Latin Classical to the end. In the liturgy of the Church the dative—I think well—has replaced the Classical genitive after *misereri* —*Agnus Dei, miserere nobis.* But Erasmus in the face of death calls "*miserere mei.*" He wrote and spoke a Classical Latin with the utmost ease. He had no need of learning French or English or German or Italian on his travels; Latin served his needs in those days. It had become, I imagine, the normal medium for his thoughts and speech.

[2] *Ep.* 185.

design. Let those who think of Erasmus as a mendicant time-server know that in his determination to advance true learning as the crying need of his times, his will was of iron. Nothing could interfere with his studies. His life might be described in words from the seventh chapter of the *Book of Wisdom,* appropriately included in the Mass for the Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas: "I loved her (Wisdom) above health and beauty, and chose to have her instead of light; for her light cannot be put out."

The invention of printing opened a new world to the scholars of the north at the time when Columbus was opening a new world across the seas. The sense of exploration in both domains stirred men's imaginations. Aldus, one of the greatest names in the annals of scholarship—not merely in the annals of printing—was putting forth editions of the Classics in which he sought not only to make the ancients accessible in neat and portable editions, but to come to the rescue of their texts corrupted both by the errors of mediaeval scribes and by the conjectures of eager scholars of the Renaissance. Erasmus learned of his aims at the time of his visit in 1507 and 1508. He speaks of that ancient codex of Pliny's *Letters* that furnished the basis for Aldus's epoch-making edition of 1508. If my conjecture is true, six leaves of that very manuscript are now treasured in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York[1]; we may examine that fragment with a new reverence at the thought that Erasmus may have held that precious volume in his own hands. Though he confesses that the task of revision irked him, though he looked in amazement at Aldus's scrupulous attention to proof-reading (to which Aldus answered that he was learning something by the way), he may well have felt him-

[1] See E. A. Lowe and E. K. Rand, *A Sixth Century Fragment of the Letters of Pliny the Younger,* Carnegie Institution of Washington, D. C., 1922.

self the heir of Aldus and his brilliant coterie when he supervised the editions of numerous Classical authors at Froben's press in Basle. New texts of Seneca, the distichs of Cato, the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae,* Curtius, Cicero's *De Officiis, Tusculan Disputations* and other dialogues, Libanius, Valla, Xenophon, Aristotle, Terence, Demosthenes, Ptolemy, Suetonius—that is a goodly sheaf to garner, sufficient to give Erasmus a high place among the scholars of his day, even though careful philological method was not his forte.

Another way in which Erasmus explored the new-found realms of gold was to translate Greek works into his living Latin that all men of culture might enjoy them. He declares that such affairs made neat little presents, such as the English were used to. His English friends, including More, Colet, Warham and Henry VIII, therefore, received little presents of Lucian's *Dialogues* or Plutarch's essays or plays of Euripides, and showed their appreciation in the fashion that Erasmus hoped. It would be ungenerous to call these works mere pot-boilers; for they induced their readers to learn Greek. When the knowledge of Greek was more widely diffused, Erasmus tells us, such works ceased to command extensive sales. The cause of Greek was dear to Erasmus to his dying day. In the last letter that he penned he speaks of the elegance of the Greek language, and earlier he had remarked that without Greek "we amount to nothing in any kind of literature."

Another undertaking inspired by his first visit to England was the *Adagia.* Erasmus's enormous reading and his retentive memory so seasoned his table talk that his friends urged him to make a collection of the proverbs and wise sayings with which his mind was full. The idea was not a new one. Erasmus had precursors both in antiquity and the Middle

Ages and in his own day, but the sources on which he chiefly drew were already within him. It is an amazing performance that won acclaim the moment that he gave it to the world in 1500. Eight hundred adages appear in this edition, and when he offered a third edition to Aldus the number had risen to 3260, and the proud title appeared: *Chiliads of Adages*. Aldus was as good a business man as a scholar; he knew how to advertise his wares.

The *Adagia* of Erasmus is, as I have indicated, no mere compilation. He may have utilized the works of Polydore Vergil that had recently appeared—and if so, he should have said so—but in essence his new dictionary of familiar quotations is an independent work. His own epigrams give an occasional spice. There are cracks at false monks and clerics, which gain a subtle sanction from the ancient adages to which they are attached. At times the comment swells into a little essay, most notably in the diatribe against war and His Holiness Pope Julius II, entitled "War is sweet to those who have not tried it" (*Dulce bellum inexpertis*) —a little work on which, as we saw, Horace would have smiled approval. Had Erasmus published nothing but his *Adagia* he would have gained a conspicuous place in the world of letters.

But even the *Adagia* was an aside for Erasmus. We must not forget that first and foremost he was a servant of the Church. He was a humanist, but a Christian humanist, one of the noble lineage represented by various Christian writers from the second century on, and established for the Western world by Lactantius in the fourth century. "I have always supported the teaching of the Gospel and the glory of Christ and to this day I have supported good literature (i.e., the literature of Greece and Rome) that it might serve Christ." These are the words not of some Father of the

fourth century or of the Middle Ages, but of Erasmus. They present his general program in unmistakable terms.[1]

But Erasmus had also a very special program, which may have been vaguely in his mind from the start, but which was clearly envisaged as a result of two inspirations—his intimacy with Colet and More on his first visit to England and his reading of Laurentius Valla at Louvain in 1503 or 1504. We think of the Renaissance as applying primarily to literature and art and the Reformation as applying to theology and church discipline. But there was also a Renaissance of theology to which Erasmus had committed his life. Colet and More talked much with him about the *vetus theologia,* to which they hoped the Church would revert after the tortuous disputations of the Scholastics, enthroned at Louvain and the Sorbonne. Luther of course, wished also to return, throwing over Papal Rome on the way, to the Gospels and the letters of St. Paul. But it was farthest from the thought of Erasmus and his English friends to dispense with the Church. They of course reverenced the Bible as a fountainhead of authority, but under the Church. The ancient theology which they wished to restore was that which had developed in the early centuries of the Church, to come to fruition in the work of the great doctors, both Greek and Latin, who laid the foundations of theology in the fourth century—Jerome, Augustine and Ambrose, Basil, the Gregories, and Chrysostom.[2] Erasmus would not sweep all that away. His attitude to the past of theology was that of the humanists, himself among them, to the past of letters and the arts. Both of his mental outlooks—the sacred no less than the secular—were directed towards a Renaissance.

[1] *Ep.* 1219: Evangelicae doctrinae Christique gloriae semper faui, bonis literis hactenus faui, ut servirent gloriae Christi. Written in 1521.

[2] *Ep.* 116.

Among the early Fathers just mentioned, St. Jerome was Erasmus's supreme master and ideal, the only one of the Fathers, he extravagantly declared,[1] who was worth reading, at least among the Latin theologians. The first step towards the ancient theology that Erasmus made was to plan an edition of St. Jerome's works beginning with the *Letters;* the text should be cleaned of mediaeval barnacles and come to the reader in its pristine form. "My ardor for correcting the text of St. Jerome is so great," he writes a friend,[2] "that I seem to myself to have been breathed upon by some impulse from on high." Again in a letter to the Pope, Leo X,[3] he declares that he has almost killed himself in giving this new birth to the works of St. Jerome. No wonder that Erasmus thought that the world owed him his living when such was his aim and such his accomplishment. Alas, he lived too soon! If the philanthropic institutions patronized by our Carnegies, Rockefellers, and Guggenheims had been in existence, Erasmus would undoubtedly have been given a handsome grant with St. Jerome for his project and a corps of research and clerical assistants at his beck and call.

St. Jerome was an admirable choice as Erasmus's patron saint, or patron theologian. They both were Christian humanists, in their different ways. They both combated heretics and expounded the Christian virtues. They both wrote commentaries on the Bible, and presented new translations of the Sacred Text. They both had keen wits and sharp tongues. They both submitted to the lure of the epigram, that winged word that in Homer's phrase escapes the barriers of the teeth, within which it had decently been confined. St. Jerome directs shafts quite as sharp as those of

[1] *Ep.* 308. But Erasmus also shows abundant acquaintance with St. Augustine and edited some of his works.
[2] *Ep.* 273.
[3] *Ep.* 335.

Erasmus against the corruption of the Church, the dainty priests of the fashionable world, the pious dames with prayer-books of purple and gold, who after a bountiful dinner dream of Apostles—*et post cenam dubiam somniant Apostolos.* The difference is this, that St. Jerome escaped the worldly Church for the tranquil purity of the cloister; Erasmus escaped the perverted cloister for the calm of a purified Church. They both were great teachers. The mighty Doctor turned aside from his scholarly labors to write a long letter on the education of a little girl, which is full of sound pedagogy, worthy of our attention today. Erasmus wrote many works of this kind in which both girls and boys and the Christian soldier and the earthly prince find patterns for their studies, their piety, their manners, and their conduct of affairs.

His great textbook is, of course, the *Colloquies,* (*Colloquia Familiaria*), written by one of the greatest Latinists of modern times. Erasmus had his fling, in the dialogue called *Ciceronianus,* at the pedants who thought no style good if its elements could not be found in Cicero. Erasmus could write in the Ciceronian manner on the proper occasion, but his brain was stored with all kinds of Latinities and he knew, as Cicero knew, and illustrated, that Latin is a growing language able to cope with the demands of any age if you only give it a chance. For conversation there is nothing like Terence, whom Erasmus had learned by heart when a schoolboy, and of Terence and many another ancient author, the *Colloquies* are full. There is nothing that he cannot make the schoolboy talk about in Latin, and no amusement dear to the schoolboy's heart that he did not understand. To take but one example, he introduces a ball game in which two students, the French Bernardus and the German Adolphus, take part. It is a simple game—only one on a side, no

crowded grandstands, no cheer leaders, no bands to parade alphabetically between the acts. But this primitive sport contained one feature of the utmost importance for stimulating the contestants to do their best, of which we have not even dreamed today. If Bernard is beaten, he is to shout "Floreat Germania!" three times. If he is the victor, then Adolphus is to shout "Floreat Gallia! Floreat Gallia! Floreat Gallia!" Imagine the Harvard team and the Harvard supporters after a defeat by their traditional foe, bellowing the regular cheer with three long "Yales" at the end! There is even an international moral to be drawn today from this simple episode, but I will refrain.[1]

But to come at last to our topic, Erasmus is a guest at Horace's feast of Comedy. Another is the saintly, and sprightly, Thomas More, the only man of the period—unless we add Pope Leo X—who knew what Erasmus was about. Erasmus wrote satire of all sorts. His spirit was moved by Juvenal and Lucian at times. Too much has been made, I believe, of the influence of Lucian and not enough of the three Roman masters of the Comic Spirit whom he learned by heart at school, Ovid in part, and Terence and Horace whole.[2] The wealth of genial irony with which the mind of Erasmus was stored was first freely displayed, it seems to me, on his first visit to England, where he found at last a congenial and Horatian atmosphere in the Oxford common room. He has left us a pleasant picture of a little dinner there and of the banter in which the guests took part. Oxford deserves some of the credit for the *Colloquies* no less than for the *Adagia,* for they spring partly, as Erasmus himself

[1] The *Colloquia* was used as a textbook at Harvard College from the beginning, with new editions constantly appearing down at least to 1833. Partridge, the barber (and ex-schoolmaster) in *Tom Jones* (Book VIII, 5), has *Erasmi Colloquia* among his books.

[2] It would be profitable to trace the growth of the Comic Spirit in Erasmus, after a thorough study of his letters as well as of his more formal works.

says, from table talk. It was more than a schoolbook from the start, and more and more as the later editions appeared it acquired the character of satire in Horace's sense with its little pictures of the life of the day. The wit is often of a jovial, slapdash, Plautine sort, for instance when he describes the miseries of German inns in contrast with the *humanitas Gallicae gentis* on this side of the Rhine. But even in this sketch there are bright little Horatian oases, as when he remarks that "no one greets a new arrival, lest they should seem to be trying to make him stay, a proceeding that they account vulgar, and quite below the gravity of a German." And again, "If they see some foreigner among them who looks like a gentleman, they stare at him all eyes, as though he were a new species of animal imported from Africa." These slaps do not apply to German hospitality as we know it today, but the types described by Erasmus still exist, in various quarters of the globe.

But the work of Erasmus in which nothing but the pure Spirit of Comedy appears, is the *Praise of Folly*. To him it was a mere *jeu d'esprit,* a *lusus,* as Horace's *Satires* were to him—although the truth told with a smile may be deep. The work has a Greek title—Ἐγκώμιον Μωρίας—for a special reason, since it is dedicated, of course, to Thomas More. I will here interpose an example of Erasmus's affection for his friend that I came across the other day in an unexpected place, his *De Copia Verborum.* Doubtless the biographers of Erasmus have seized it long ago, but it came to me with the freshness of a discovery. This work, quite as remarkable in its way as the *Adagia,* is a phrase-book somewhat like Roget's *Thesaurus.* I suppose that Erasmus must have borrowed from various predecessors, but they could not have contained all the wealth of Latinity that he has here amassed. Thus, to come to my example, one of the headings

is: *Semper dum vivam tui meminero,* "I will remember you as long as I live." On this phrase Erasmus plays variations, like a musician on a theme. I have not counted the number of equivalent phrases, but since they fill three and one-half folio pages, I know that none but Erasmus could have supplied the most of them. Early in the list comes this one: *Ipse prius e vivis excessero quam Morus e nostra excesserit memoria,* "I shall depart from the living sooner than Morus departs from my memory." In no less than eighteen of those that follow, the phrase is twined about the name of his friend.

So then, asks Erasmus in the preface to his lighter work, "To whom else could I dedicate it? I was reminded first of your *cognomen,* Morus, which is as near to the word Μωρία ('folly') as you are temperamentally far from it. Then I knew that you can appreciate this kind of play; for you dare to look on the high comedy of life with the laughing philosopher and to disdain to grovel in buffoonery with the mob. Of course I shall get criticism for descending from the dignity of a theologian (he did) and of indulging in un-Christian vituperation. But I have the authority of St. Jerome and *you* will understand. My method is not Juvenalian; I am not stirring the depths of slime. I am laughing at folly, not flagellating vice. So fare you well, my witty More and defend your Moriosity stoutly. Dated in the country." It was the English countryside where Erasmus wrote this work, as we have seen, in seven days. The date added is June 9, 1508. Although it is wrong, it is, if I may be allowed a paradox, one of the most important dates in the history of comedy.[1]

[1] It is the date given in the Froben edition (1522). But Erasmus did not return from Italy till 1509 (see Mangan, *op. cit.,* I p. 290). Either Erasmus or his editor had a slip of memory—less probably some covert reason. Naturally the exact day, month and year do not here concern us.

In form and length, there is nothing quite like this work in what has come down from antiquity, though Lucian gave some suggestions. The animating idea, however, derives from that Queen of Horace's *Satires* (II 3) in which we take a *vue générale* of a mad world. Elsewhere in the *Satires,* as we saw, there are other smaller pictures of episodes and individuals, which were also meant to be hung in Horace's Gallery of Fools. The idea has been generalized in the Third Satire of Book II and now Erasmus enlarges it yet further. He composes, to use a term he might not like, a *summa stultitiae.*

This takes the form of a speech, an *Encomium,* of which the speaker is Folly and the subject the praise of herself. The speech is planned deliberately on the rules of the later Sophists, who had nicely elaborated an art of praise which could be accommodated to the most unpraisable of mortals. Folly applies this art to herself. Erasmus has not merely writ Horace large: he would not merely illustrate the prevalence of folly among mortals, but prove that from Folly's point of view she is the salvation of the race. This kind of satire is admirably self-protective, like that of More's *Utopia.* Horace had invented an armor of this sort, as we saw, in ridiculing the third person in terms of the first. The reader asks, "Does he really mean himself, or, dreadful thought, does he mean me?" In like fashion, one often queries in reading the *Encomion Morias,* "Just who *is* the speaker anyway?" "I never knew anybody so wise," says Folly, "as not to follow Pleasure—wise did I say? I mean foolish—no, I believe I mean wise." And thus she keeps us wondering.

Let me take an example, which will show that Erasmus can pass the acid test of a humorist, the ability to laugh at himself and his kind. Folly has shown what an asset to so-

ciety is a hale fool well met, the man who can get along with people and do the ordinary things. But take the scholar! "Invite him to a dinner, and he will either maintain a glum silence or bore the assemblage with his latest discoveries (*molestis quaestiunculis*). Ask him to a dance and he will perform a camel-trot (*camelum saltare*). Drag him to the movies, and the very sight of him will interfere with the general enjoyment. He'll leave after the first reel like Anthony Comstock (*sapiens Cato*), unable to make his high brow low (*quandoquidem supercilium non potest ponere*). If he has to buy something, or talk business, or do any of the things without which life cannot go on, your wise man will act more like a log than a human being. How can he be a desirable citizen when he doesn't know what is going on and holds himself aloof from the thoughts and practices of the vulgar? He naturally acquired a certain odium, because he's so different. For what human action is not plenteously compounded of folly, a work *of* fools, *by* fools and *for* fools? So if an individual must run counter to all his kind, I'd advise him like Timon, that misanthrope of old, to move into the wilds, and enjoy his own wisdom *solus*."

Now a scholar, reading this passage, might uncomfortably suspect that if a sage had delivered this diatribe, there might be a grain of truth in it. But these are the words of Folly, and of course not true—and yet?

The encomiast, as I have said, delivers her speech with due observance of the ancient rules. Wearing her well-known headdress, she mounts the pulpit amid the chuckles of the spectators, and announces that in one stroke she has carried out the prescription of Quintilian which it may take an ordinary orator hours to effect—to render your audience benevolent, *auditores benivolos reddere*. Folly's hearers are pleased from the start. "Put on your ears," she remarks,

"not the kind you carry to church but those that you elongate at the show, and listen to the words of Folly, her extemporaneous effort in a form universally approved, though not universally proclaimed, self-laudation. Don't expect any *definitio* of the subject, nor any *divisio*. Folly has no *finis:* she is one, indivisible and endless." She next explains her parentage: she was born of Wealth and Youth in the Fortunate Isles during the Golden Age: she was educated by the nymphs Tipsy and Stupid, with appropriate maids-in-waiting. She is a goddess, and has done more for mankind than the deities who invented corn and oil and wine. She bestowed birth on the human race. For how is birth possible without matrimony? And what man would put on the muzzle of matrimony without Folly's aid? What woman would inveigle him into the muzzle if she could foresee what housekeeping means? As with Birth, so all the charm of Infancy is its folly, and so with the Youth. Even as he wizens (not wisens) into maturity, and the shades of the prison-house close about him, he still is Folly's Priest, and in Old Age he blandly reverts to a Second Childhood of Folly. Who can stand a very active old man whom you constantly have to compliment on his activity? The pleasant old man is the stupid one, who does not overplay his part.

And now we rise to Olympus, and note that the useful and attractive gods are the Foolish ones, not the sooty coal-heaver, Vulcan, but Bacchus and Venus and Cupid. The only time when Vulcan gave the gods an inextinguishable laugh was when he bustled round and made a fool of himself. The reign of Folly is universal. She is present in all human institutions and pleasures—*Wein, Weib, und Gesang,* friendship, love, and war. Surely, after this long and sparkling elaboration, Folly has proved her right to a place with the other divinities.

What of her temperament, her qualities? That is a topic that no encomiast can neglect. The first is *Fortitudo,* then *Industria,* then something a trifle surprising, but cogently set forth, her *Prudentia*—and then, with the help of an invocation to the Gods, yes, her *Sapientia.* There are, of course, the four cardinal virtues, with the significant exceptions that *Iustitia* is replaced by *Prudentia* (as sometimes happens), and *Temperantia* by *Industria.* After a cogent exposition of the blessings of Folly and the inconveniences of Wisdom, she describes the different classes of her faithful adherents —Professors, Poets, Lawyers, Philosophers, Theologians, Monks, Courtiers, Bishops, Cardinals, Popes—and then after learnedly setting forth her authorities—Pagan, Biblical and Patristic—she climbs in a *Peroratio* to a height on which she sits identical with *Summum Bonum,* and descends in an epilogue in which she will attempt no recapitulation, since she has forgotten what she has said.

I have given but the outline of Folly's *Encomium.* All the way along there are pleasant pictures of diversified inanity, including the description of a day on Olympus, where the gods, after finishing a hard morning's work at hearing vows, drop round to the Club, steep themselves pleasantly in nectar, and look down from their windows mellowly on the great human show. Then there are wise observations, if Folly's words are wise. One becomes convinced of the blessedness of idiots—

Felices nimium stulti bona si sua norint.

For one thing, they can tell the truth. It is always pleasant to tell the truth, if you can do so without offending anybody —but that privilege is reserved only for fools. One sees with mortal as well as celestial eyes the theatre of life, which the wise strip of its charm, while Folly preserves its illusion.

One sounds with Folly the depths of human woe, the awful reality, to which she can make us blind. Towards the end of her discourse, when the talk is of the Church, she almost forgets her part. She speaks as a satirist and a reformer. This is that mood of seriousness which must underlie satire, for otherwise it would pall. Satire and sympathy, Thackeray remarks, walk hand-in-hand. But this tone is not continued too long. Just as the reader is about to conclude that not only Folly but the author has forgotten her past, she blithely shakes her bells, and leaves the pulpit, remarking as she goes, "Please excuse me if I've been saucy; remember I am Folly and a woman."

Never was Horace's maxim, " 'Tis sweet in season to play the fool" (*dulce est desipere in loco*), more amply justified than in Folly's *Encomium*. No wit quite so subtle had appeared since Ovid presented a *Remedy of Love,* almost indistinguishable from the disease. No reformation or counter-reformation is needed after Folly's sermon. Leo X read the work with a proper amusement and observed that the author had built his own little niche in the Gallery of Fools; professor and pope are both there. The Sorbonne, losing temper, like More's Friar, condemned the book in 1542, and one worthy Lutheran, if my memory is not astray, bought a picture of Erasmus and placed it in his library that he might spit at it, as he walked round and round. Neither he nor his master, whose methods of rejoinder were not much more subtle, could see that the permanent reformer was Erasmus. Nigellus Wireker, who wrote towards the end of the twelfth century a satire entitled the *Mirror of Fools* (*Speculum Stultorum*) which, though a product of the dark and Middle Ages, may be put on the same shelf with Erasmus's masterpiece, tells a story of two cows, Bicornis and Brunetta, whose tails froze into an icy field; the

former pulled away at once, minus her tail, the latter waited for it to thaw out. Nigellus tells us that these cows are allegorical. The former symbolizes those reformers who are *nimis indiscreti et valde praecipites*. The cow who waited comfortably for the sun to effect the work of liberation betokens those who are governed by riper counsels, by the spirit of wisdom and understanding. This allegory of the cows is also a prophecy of Luther and Erasmus. Our times, too, are ready for that gentler melting of the ice in which we are encased. Erasmus, with that look which you can see in Holbein's portrait of him, or even better still in that of Metsys, would have scanned our eager, efficient, and most pugnacious world and found it primitive.

In the loftier levels of this comedy—I feel like calling it a Divine Comedy—of Erasmus, Folly's analysis of our human lot, our human shams, is keen and pitiless. Only fools are allowed to speak the truth, as the fools in *Lear* and *Twelfth Night* speak it. If Shakespeare did not know Erasmus, they both have ascended by different paths (Erasmus hand-in-hand with Horace) to these rarely visited heights of wisdom—excuse me, I should say folly—no, it is rather wisdom.

The idea for this *Praise of Folly* came to Erasmus, as we have seen, while he rode his horse over the Alps. Some critics have noticed with surprise, and a certain sentimentality, that Erasmus has no word to say about the beauty of Alpine scenery. Perhaps he may have taken it in at the corners of his eyes, but at the moment his mind was occupied with a wider view from the summit of Olympus.

In conclusion I have an audacious idea to express. Since Sir Thomas More, both wit and saint, has been duly canonized, may there yet be a chance for the dearest of his friends? If you contemplate in those eleven volumes the contribution made by Erasmus to a better knowledge of the

Fathers and of the Sacred Text—matters that I have scarcely broached—it is hard to refuse him the title that some have wished to give him of a Doctor of the Church. Of course there is his wit to pardon, and his sarcasms that border on calumnies, but he made full confession for all these sorry jests—*lusus* as he calls them—and both More and Jerome were guilty of a like offense. Of course he was not a martyr—and yet was Saint Sebastian tortured more than he by the arrows shot at his heart from right and left? Yet it would be audacious even to hope, though for me the hope is very tempting, that one day, possibly *malgré lui,* he may be declared St. Desiderius Erasmus. But perhaps it will be just as well to leave him content with the title, one of the highest of titles, of a friend of comedy, and of Horace.

As I said at the outset of this lecture, it would be interesting to hear what the other guests at Horace's banquet of comedy have to say. Meredith has spoken for some of them—even though he failed to invite Horace to the feast. He has a place for Fielding, who richly deserves it. I have recently re-read *Tom Jones,* which is full of Horatian precept and Horatian sparkle and of actual bits of Horace from cover to cover. He can shake hands with the Horace of the earlier *Satires,* the commonly called coarse satires. He treats coarseness, the coarseness of Squire Western, in the same way, not as a spur to pruriency but as matter for honest laughter. Jane Austen is more refined, in keeping with her age, but no less keenly Horatian in her slim, feasting smile at egoism. The same may be said of Trollope. We must certainly not leave Thackeray out, nor the presiding geniuses of *Punch* who for decade after decade have subjected men and nations to the kindly and relentless light of comedy. Two of their number, C. L. Graves and E. V. Lucas, published in 1896 two little volumes of the best Horatian

parodies that to my knowledge have ever appeared, *The Hawarden Horace* and *More Hawarden Horace,* which are named from Mr. Gladstone's country place and which with the proper courtesy make a comic character of their serious hero. One of the best Horatians of modern times was Austin Dobson, *ad unguem factus Horatianus vir,* who reproduced Horace's poetical themes and Horace's spirit in numerous ways. Indeed, as we survey the beneficiaries of Horace's legacy down the centuries, we may well conclude, with Dobson, that, though several of them have received handsome shares, none possessed all that he had to leave.

Science proceeds and art stands still.
Our world today's as good or ill,
As cultured (nearly),
As you were, Horace. You alone
Unmet, unmatched, we have not known.

EDWARD KENNARD RAND.